CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Data has repeatedly shown that children of color and their families are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system in America. For example, according to the U.S. Census (2000), African American children comprised 15% of the total U.S. child population under the age of 18; however, African American children accounted for 37% of the total number of children placed in foster care. Although racial disproportionality is most severe and dramatic for African American children, Native American children also experience higher rates of disproportionality in foster care than do children of other races or ethnicities. In 2004, Native American children represented less than 1 percent of the total child population in the United States; however, 2 percent of children in foster care were Native American. Hispanic/Latino children are 19 percent of the child population and 17 percent of the children in foster care.

Race is a significant factor that affects a decision to place a child in foster care. Research has shown children of color, when compared to white children, are more likely to be removed from the care and custody of their birth parents and placed in foster care. Once in foster care, they remain longer, and they receive fewer services; they have less contact with child welfare caseworkers while they are in care (Barth, 1997; Child Welfare Watch, 1998; Harris & Skyles, 2005; Harris & Hackett, 2008). Children of color have suffered for decades from racism that exists in the child welfare system. For example, Latino children are often removed from Spanish-speaking birth parents and placed in foster homes where English is the only language spoken. A judge in Texas threatened a young Latina birth mother by stating that he would remove her child and place the child with her father unless she agreed to speak only English in her home (Verhovek, 1995). Native American children have also been adversely affected by racism in the child welfare system.

Native American peoples experienced removal of their children as a part of the process of reducing and exterminating Tribes beginning with the first European contacts including Columbus. Continuing established colonial polices of England, Spain, France and others the initial policies of the United States aimed to exterminate the "Indian problem" (Beane, 1989). Removing children from Native American families often reduced the size of Tribes and the population of reservations; this lead to claims of reduction in the size of reservations and tribal lands. From the 1870s to the 1930s Federal Indian agents sent Native American children from the ages of five to 20 to boarding schools. Often, they took the children without consent of parents. Indian agents had the authority to withhold food and clothing from parents who resisted sending their children away. The boarding schools operated under harsh conditions where children were not able to use their native language or traditional customs, were required to wear uniforms and cut their hair, and were subjected to military discipline and standards (George, 1997). At the same time, the boarding schools provided little or no educational benefit to indigenous people (Noriega, 1992). Central to the boarding school movement were Manual Labor Schools where American Indian youth trained on farms and in domestic tasks from 1834 on. An outing system that placed American Indian students in farms, homes or businesses for vocational training from Indian boarding schools was described in contemporary and historical accounts as a source of slave labor more than a training opportunity (Noriega, 1992; Trennert, 1983).

Writing in the mid 1970s, Dlugokinski and Kramer (1974) report that from their earliest history, boarding schools were a system intending to "patronize and control" American Indian children (p. 670). They found that the boarding school system in the 1970s was little different from earlier boarding schools. Real student participation in boarding schools was discouraged. Counseling services were not provided. Opportunities to learn from traditional American Indian approaches were not available, and dropout rates were high (Dlugokinski & Kramer, 1974). Robin, Rasmussen and Gonzalez-Santin (1999) found

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that males from one Southwestern Tribe who attended boarding schools were more likely to be diagnosed with drug abuse disorders and more likely to have multiple lifetime psychiatric disorders than males who had not attended boarding schools. Another outcome of boarding schools and relocation efforts has been the destruction of kinship networks that could provide support and assistance to families raising children (Cross, 1986).

As the number of boarding schools began to be reduced in the 1930s and 1940s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) began to look for alternative placements for American Indian and Alaska Native children (George, 1997). In 1958, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) in cooperation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs initiated the Indian Adoption Project to change the image of American Indian children from "hard-to-place" children to adoptable children. Three hundred and ninety-five American Indian children were placed for adoption with non-Indian families in eastern metropolitan areas through the project. CWLA participation gave credence to the practice of taking Native American children from their homes and villages and sending them to distant European-American communities. The main effect of the project was to stimulate adoption of Native American children by state and other private agencies, contributing to 25% to 35% of Native American children being separated from their families, with the vast majority going into non-Indian homes (George, 1997). In Washington State, Native American adoptive placement rates were 19 times the rate for non-Indian adoptions (Mannes, 1995).

In 2001, CWLA President and CEO Shay Bilchik acknowledged and offered "sincere and deep regret" for CWLA's role in the Indian Adoption Project (Kreisher, 2002). Bilchik said, "No matter how well intentioned and how squarely in the mainstream this was at the time, it was wrong, it was hurtful, and it reflected a kind of bias that surfaces feelings of shame" (Kreisher, 2002).

Racial disproportionality in child welfare has also been an issue for Asian and Pacific Islander children and families. A central issue in the research has been the number of ethnic and national groups combined as Asian. For example, the Asian and Pacific Islander census group includes more than 20 different ethnic groups with different languages, countries of origin, and socioeconomic statuses (Pelczarski & Kemp, 2006). Large differences between ethnic groups and in social and racial perceptions of families from different ethnic groups make summary statements about all Asian and Pacific Islanders misleading. Specifically, in a sample of children in the Washington state child welfare system from July 1995 to June 1997, Samoan and Cambodian families were overrepresented in the CPS system while Japanese and Chinese families were underrepresented (Pelczarski & Kemp, 2006).

An extensive review of the literature suggests the United States child welfare system is currently facing a crisis involving race and poor outcomes for children and families. This crisis has resulted in the disproportionate number of children of color entering the system and encountering extreme difficulty exiting the system. Several terms are frequently used to discuss racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. The following are definitions for terms that will be used throughout this report:

- **Family Structure** refers to two or more persons who live in the same home and are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law or adoption. It is composed of members, relationships, roles (who does what), rules (how each member is supposed to act), rituals, communication dynamics, physical and psychological assets, limitations, boundaries, and identity. Family structure is operationally defined based on composition and relationship as delineated by an individual at the point of entry into the child welfare system.

- **Poverty** is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. Poverty is operationally defined on the basis of eligibility for food stamps.

- **Racial disparity** occurs when the rate of disproportionality of one racial group (e.g., African Americans) exceeds that of a comparison group (e.g., White Americans).
- **Racial disproportionality** occurs when the population of children of color in any system including the child welfare system is higher than the population of children of color in the general population.
- **Racism** is the domination of one social, racial or ethnic group over another. It is used to justify the institutional discrimination of various racial groups against others.
- **Institutional abuse and neglect** occur when social institutions, the legal system, the medical care system and the child welfare system do not attempt to meet the needs of all children or set out to harm children or provide unequal treatment for children. These acts can be defined as institutional abuse and neglect (Giovannoni, 1985). Often, when describing institutional neglect on a grand scale, authors refer to the 200 years of United States federal government policies and practices designed to disrupt Native American lifestyles and families (Giovannoni, 1985; Pecora, Whittaker, Maluccio, Barth, & Plotnick, 2000).
- **Individual racism** refers to individual thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors that are based on a belief of genetic superiority held by an individual who considers others inferior.
- **Institutional racism** refers to educational, economic, social and/or political systems that intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate racial inequality.
- **Structural racism** refers to the power relationships inherent in our institutions and social structures (e.g., jobs, housing, and education, health care) that produce racial inequality and limit opportunities for people of color.

Although children of color have been disproportionately represented in the child welfare system for many decades, current research indicates disproportionality of children of color in the child welfare system is a national concern. In September 2002, the U. S. Children's Bureau convened a Research Roundtable of national experts/researchers in Washington, DC on Racial Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System to explore the extent and ramifications of this issue. Seven papers were commissioned for the roundtable and subsequently published (2003) in *Children and Youth Services Review, 25* (5/6); the papers explored varied explanations for racial and ethnic disproportionality and examined the ways in which children enter and exit the child welfare system. Among the major findings are the following:

- Disproportionality may be more pronounced at some decision-making points (e.g., investigation) than at others (e.g., substantiation) (Fluke, Yuan, Hedderson, & Curtis, 2003).
- Family structure was found to be significant. Race and ethnicity were found to have a different effect on family reunification rates in two-parent families than in single-parent families (Harris & Courtney, 2003).
- Changes in policy and practice may be effective over time in reducing racial and ethnic disproportionalities, particularly those arising from differences in duration of out-of-home care (Wulczyn, 2003).

Some state research studies on racial disproportionality have started to identify types of disparity and where disparity occurs in the child welfare system. A study of 16,581 reported cases of child abuse and/or neglect and 1,001 substantiated cases was conducted in Utah (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). Findings from this study of Hispanic and White non-Hispanic children revealed that Hispanic children in Utah spent a significantly longer time in foster care than White children and entered care at a younger age (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). "The author's suggest that systematic discrimination may occur when caseworkers perceive younger

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Hispanic children, or those in households with single mothers, as being at higher risk for maltreatment. The results show the need for increased cultural awareness among child welfare professionals, especially at the stages of care assessment and decision-making" (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005, p.1).

A commission was created by the legislature in 2007 to examine the over-representation of African American children in the Indiana child welfare system; based on findings from a 2005 report. Findings revealed, "Black children are over-represented at every point in the child welfare system, from investigations and out-of-home care to termination of parental rights" (Evans, 2008, p.1). The racial disparity issue in Indiana was further highlighted in a 2004 report by the Center for the Study of Social Policy; this report indicated that African American youth in Indiana were almost four times as likely to be removed from the homes of birth families and placed in foster care as White youth. This report recommended education and support services that were inclusive and recognized the significance of extended family in work with African American families.

In Minnesota, a study of neglect cases in four counties found little differences in services and outcomes between African American and White children. However, disproportionality appeared to exist in case reporting and screening and the length of time children waited for adoption (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).

A qualitative study by the U. S. Children's Bureau was conducted at nine child welfare agencies across American to explore attitudes and perceptions of agency administrators, supervisors and caseworkers who were addressing the issue of racial disproportional- ity. Children of color were disproportionately represented in the child welfare system for many reasons that include the following:

- Poverty and poverty-related circumstances are major contributors to the overrepresen- tation of minority children.
- Poor families are more likely to use public services such as public health clinics and receive TANF, making any problems they may be experiencing more visible to the community.
- Some felt that disproportionality is the result of discriminatory practices within society, specifically, school and hospital personnel report minority parents for child abuse and neglect more frequently than non-minority parents.
- Many of those interviewed felt that lack of understanding of the cultural norms of mi- nority populations, along with racial bias, often interfered with good decision-making of the caseworkers.
- The impact of Federal policies on the ways that agencies serve children and families was also noted (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004, p. 1).

Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) recognizes a complex relationship between child welfare systems and juvenile justice systems that influences disproportionate repre- sentation of children of color in both systems (CWLA, n. d.). Available research suggests at least three paths to the juvenile justice system from child welfare. First, if appropriate in-home service provisions are offered by the child welfare system, children of color may be less likely to enter the juvenile justice system (Johnson-Reid, 2002). This suggests a risk for under serving youth in the child welfare system, thus Asian or Hispanic youth who may receive fewer child welfare services may be more likely to be overrepresented in ju- venile justice. Second, a risk exists of providing the wrong services; for example, children and families that should receive mental health services enter the child welfare system and later the juvenile justice system (descriptions of disproportionate service provision are provided later in this report). Third, there is the risk that the child welfare system becomes

a back door to juvenile justice increasing the risk that youth who have not committed a crime are sent to detention or secure juvenile corrections facilities (Ryan, Herz, Hernandez, & Marshall, 2007). This back door approach to juvenile justice has been shown to be a risk for African American and Native American youth (Poupart, 1995; Poupart, 2002; Ryan et al., 2007; Short & Sharp, 2005).

Services, Support and Outcomes

Unwarranted involvement in the juvenile justice system is one of the results of disproportionate representation of children of color in the child welfare system. Across the United States, their cases are not handled in an expeditious manner; children of color and their families experience disparities in services, support and eventual outcomes. "[T]he child protection process is designed in a way that practically invites racial bias. Vague definitions of neglect, unbridled discretion, and lack of training form a dangerous combination in the hands of caseworkers charged with deciding the fate of families" (Roberts, 2002, p. 55).

Decisions Points in the Child Welfare System

No simple explanation will describe why children of color continue to be disproportionately represented at each decision point in the child welfare system. The purpose of this literature review is to provide information from a variety of sources regarding the extent and ramifications of racial disproportionality that exist in the child welfare system in the United States. The review will examine key decision points in the child welfare system and also explore poverty and family structure. Finally, the review will examine information and data regarding birth fathers that are often forgotten by the child welfare system, although they significantly impact their children's lives and often play a significant role in many families.

Investigation and Substantiation

Four major front-end decision points exist in the child welfare system: (a) referral of a case to the system; (b) investigation of a referral; (c) substantiation of the referral; and (d) removal of child from the home (Lemon, D'Andrade, & Austin, 2005). Any initial report is screened by a child welfare worker to determine if the report warrants an investigation and case opening. Research suggests that cases involving children of color may be opened for an investigation at a higher rate than cases involving White children (Lemon, D'Andrade, & Austin 2005). In one study of 12 sites across five states, cases involving African American children had an investigation rate of 90%, compared to 68% for White children, 53% for Hispanic children and 67% for children of "Other" ethnicities. In a separate analysis of data from five states, African American children were significantly over-represented among investigations in two states; Asian/Pacific Islander children were over-represented in four states; Native American children were over-represented in three states, and White children were consistently under-represented at the stage of investigation across all five states (Lemon, D'Andrade, & Austin, 2005). In the GAO Report (2007), state child welfare directors reported the following factors may increase the number of African American children entering foster care: (a) lack of affordable housing; (b) lack of substance abuse services; (c) limited access to family support services to prevent entry and re-entry into foster care; and (d) limited or inadequate legal representation of birth parents.

Referrals

Referrals may come from various sources such as family members, neighbors, and/or mandated reporters. Allegations can be justified due to neglect, maltreatment, abuse, or drug/alcohol abuse. The odds of referral to Child Protective Services (CPS) for a determined victim classified as multiracial are 1.57 times the odds as a White victim when there are identical family conditions, types of maltreatment, and county of residence

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(Johnson, Clark, Pedersen, & Pichott, 2007). In 2002, California had 2.6 million children reported to the child welfare system; about 36 of every 1,000 children were referred to the system; approximately 67% of those referrals were investigated; about one-quarter of investigated referrals were substantiated (Lemon, D'Andrade, & Austin, 2005). Another study conducted in California (2003), found that 493,091 children were reported to the child welfare system. About 52 of every 1,000 children were referred; over 80% of those referrals were investigated, and over 27% of the investigated referrals were substantiated (Little & Schuerman, 1995). Of the cases that were substantiated, about 30% entered out-of-home care. A study in Minnesota showed that, in 39 of 41 reporting states, African American children were overrepresented in the child welfare system when the propor-tion of confirmed reports was compared to the number of African Americans in the state of Minnesota child population (Johnson, Clark, Donald, Pedersen, & Pichott, 2007). The percentage of confirmed reports for African American children was six times the percent-age of the African American child population; the largest disparity for any reporting state. American Indian and Hispanic children were overrepresented in states 15 and 11 of the 41 states respectively (Johnson, Clark, Donald, Pedersen, & Pichott, 2007).

Mandated reporters are responsible for a large proportion of referrals to CPS and have been found to increase the disparities among African American and Native American chil-dren involved in the system. Chand (2000) proposed that "exposure bias" and not racial prejudice is the reason for the disproportionate high number of reports.

According to this view because children from African American and Native American families are more likely to be poor, they are more likely to be exposed to mandated reporters as they turn to the public social service system for support in times of need. Problems that other families could keep private become public as a family receives Tem-porary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), seeks medical care from a public clinic, or lives in public housing. This exposure bias (also called visibility bias) has been particularly well documented in child welfare referrals from medical settings. "Though several studies have shown the prevalence of addiction is the same for all races and social classes, hos-pitals serving poor families are more likely to conduct routine drug screening on women giving birth and on newborns, thereby increasing the likelihood of entry into the child welfare system for families served by such hospitals" (Cahn & Harris, 2005, p. 6).

Although White and Black women are equally likely to test positive for drugs, African American women were 10 times more likely to be reported to CPS after delivery (Karp, 2001; Drug Policy Alliance, 2005). Findings are mixed regarding treatment outcomes when there is racial matching between workers of color and clients of color (Wyatt, 2003; Chinman, Rosenheck, & Lam, 2000; Paniagu, 1998; Sue, Fujino, Hu Takeuchi, & Zane, 1991).

One study in California found that when health and school officials suspect abuse, neglect, or violence against a child of color disproportionate rates of reporting increase (Bowser & Jones, 2004).

Substantiation

Following the decision to investigate a referral from a report, a decision on whether to substantiate the allegation of maltreatment or to dismiss the case must be made. In a 2003 study, African Americans were 11% of the population of children in San Francisco but were 45% of all reported allegations of child abuse, neglect, or violence; focus group participants believed that poverty was the primary reason for the disproportionate num-ber of African Americans being reported to the Child Protective Service hotlines (Bowser & Jones, 2004).

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While national studies have shown that alcohol and drug abuse have been the major cause of child neglect among African Americans, Bowser and Jones (2004) found no higher incidence of abuse and neglect in African American and Native American families. Despite a lack of differences in rates of abuse, research consistently shows racial differences in rates of cases opened for investigation and in rates of substantiation. Research has suggested that social worker misunderstanding of African American norms and expectations about control and discipline of children could lead to disproportionality in risk assessment (McPhatter, 1997). Failure to understand cultural norms has also been suggested for non-Native American workers who may mislabel traditional and safe Native American patterns of supervision as neglect (Mosby, Rawls, Meehan, Mays, & Pettinari, 1999). The odds of a positive maltreatment determination for an African American victim in Minnesota were found to be 1.17 times the odds of a maltreatment determination for a White victim, given identical family conditions, types of allegations, type of reporter, and county (Johnson, Clark, Donald, Pedersen, & Pichotta, 2007). Though African American parents are more likely to be referred for drug treatment, they are more likely to receive a lower quality of services or little or no services (Walker, Zangrillo, & Smith, 1994). This was also found to be true with mental health services (Garland, Landsverk, & Lau, 2002).

Research has shown that "exposure bias" is evident at each decision point within the child welfare system. Investigators are more likely to err on the side of substantiation for African American children who have received child abuse reports in the past. Workload among caseworkers also affects their day-to-day decision-making and the time they are able to give towards an investigation before making a final decision. The following barriers pose problems in timely permanency planning for all children regardless of race: (a) high worker turnover; (b) conflicting requirements for multiple oversight systems (TANF, housing, child welfare); (c) absence of substance abuse or mental health treatment programs that can ensure parental recovery from addiction and mental illness within timelines stipulated by policy; and (d) failure to communicate hope or respect by child welfare workers (Cahn & Harris, 2005).

In some cases the standards set for a family by the investigating worker lack cultural competence and are culturally insensitive to the population he/she is serving. For example, one study found that African Americans may have more children and require help from extended family members. However, birth parents are required to meet certain standards i.e. maintain a household separate from extended family with a telephone, ability to defray the cost of electricity, cable, water, etc. Payment of these expenses is routine for families in an upper class or middle class household, but payment is very difficult for families in poor households (Bowser & Jones, 2004). Although extended family members receive some support, there are disparities in the services they receive; the financial support for kinship caregivers is lower than support given to licensed foster parents. Studies show a higher percentage of African American and Native American children are placed with kinship caregivers, and literature shows that regardless of race kinship caregivers receive fewer services than foster parents (Berrick, Barth, & Needell, 1994). Kinship caregivers are often reluctant to become involved with the child welfare system and do not apply for services; they feel that it is best for them to take care of their families and address their problems without involvement of the child welfare system or other social service systems (Caliber-Associates, 2003).

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Placements

Statistics indicate that children of color are more likely to be placed in out-of-home care, experience multiple moves, and remain in out-of-home care longer than White children (Cahn & Harris, 2005). In an investigation of placement outcomes among children in Illinois, the study found that 53.7% of referred African American children were placed in out-of-home care, compared to 38% of White children (Lemon, D'Andrade, & Austin,

2005). Findings from another study by Bowser and Jones (2004) revealed the lack of investigators resulted in increased substantiation rates because of shorter time lines for decision making; investigators substantiated allegations rather than make a determination of unfounded or inconclusive because of liability issues. In California, 41.9% of Native Americans and 41.7% of Blacks had cases substantiated. Native Americans and Blacks also had the highest rates of out-of-home placement, followed by Whites at 32.9%, Hispanics 29.2%, and Asians at 25.0% (Lemon, D'Andrade, & Austin, 2005).

Some African American children remain in care longer when placed in voluntary kinship care; these placements last longer than non-kinship care placements; family reunification with birth parents is slower for children in kinship care placements when compared with children in non-kinship care placements because adoption is always a possibility for children in non-kinship care placements (Bowser & Jones, 2004). From 1999-2003, African American children were in kinship care placements at least five or more days with a median of 854 days in care; Whites were in care 546 days, Hispanics 649 days, and Asians 539 days (Needell, et al., 2004). African American and Native American children are adversely affected by service disparities during their long placements in out-of-home care.

In 1997, the U.S. Children's Bureau reported that, among children receiving child welfare services, 56% of African American children were placed in foster care, while 72% of Caucasian children received in-home services. When services are offered, numerous studies have found differences attributable specifically to race and to no other characteristic in the quantity or quality of services delivered to families of color (Courtney, Barth, Berrick, Brooks, & Parks, 1996; Saunders, Nelson, & Landsman, 1993; Close, 1983). Harris and Skyles (2004), found that "research on delivery of services to children and their families in the child welfare system consistently demonstrates that African American children are at a disadvantage regarding the range and quality of services provided, the type of agency to which they are referred, the efficiency with which their cases are handled, the support their families receive, and their eventual outcomes" (p. 95). In a national review by Hill, six studies were cited that confirmed service disparities for children or color based on race (Courtney et al., 1996; Katz, Hampton, Newberger, & Bowles, 1986; Fanshel, 1981; Jeter, 1963; Maluccio & Fein, 1989; Olsen 1982). Olsen (1982) found of all ethnic groups that Native American families had the least chance to be recommended for services. A review of the literature on disproportionality by Courtney et al. (1996) concluded that a pattern of disparity based on race and ethnicity seemed to exist in the provision of child welfare services.

Reunification

While the role of CPS is to act in the best interests of the child, it is just as important that families are provided with the necessary support and services to facilitate reunification with their children. Yet, this is also an area where disparity exists. Racial inequity in service availability and service delivery is the strongest contributing factor implicated in the disproportional numbers of children of color in placement in child welfare (Harris & Hackett, 2008). A study in Minnesota found that the odds of reunification for an African American child are 1.19 times the odds of reunification for a White child, given identical reasons cited for placement (Johnson, Clark, Donald, Pedersen, & Pichotta, 2007). Findings from a study conducted in California were as follows:

1. Males were slightly less likely to be reunified than females.
2. Infants and adolescents were reunified slower than children of other ages.
3. Children removed from home because of neglect returned home at a slower rate than children removed for other reasons.
4. Child health problems slowed the rate of reunification
5. Children in kinship foster homes and foster family homes returned home more slowly than children in other placement types.

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6. African American children were reunified at a slower rate than other children.

7. Children from two-parent families were returned home faster than children from single-parent homes, regardless of the gender of the single parent (Harris & Courtney, 2003, p. 423).

In regards to service participation, it has been found that "African American or Native American parents may have negative past experiences, may have heard stories from others about negative experiences, or may have no familiarity at all with the service delivery system." The long negative histories of these communities with the child welfare system can lead parents to feelings of "hopelessness, frustration, and greater likelihood of resignation and defeat than for others who have reason to believe the system could work in their favor" (Cahn & Harris, 2005, p. 10).

Poverty

National studies show that different racial and ethnic groups have differences in poverty rates and family structure (Johnson, Clark, Donald, Pedersen, & Pichotta, 2007). In 1997, the National Survey of American Families (NSAF) indicated that minority families were almost twice as likely as White families to be living below the poverty level (Johnson, Clark, Donald, Pedersen, & Pichott, 2007). According to Staveteig (2000), children whose birth family is African American, American Indian, and Hispanic were almost three times as likely to be poor as children whose birth families is White or Asian. Findings of the GAO Report (2007) demonstrated 23% of African Americans lived below the poverty level as compared to 6% of Whites who lived in poverty. Findings also revealed that 33 states reported high rates of poverty in the African American community; other findings regarding African Americans included: 25% single parenthood, 24% substance abuse, and 14% interaction with mandated reporters as possible indicators for increased disproportionality.

Poverty also tends to be associated with certain family structures at a higher rate than others (Johnson, Clark, Donald, Pedersen, & Pichotta, 2007). The NSAF (1997) reported that poverty in one-parent families was four times as high as poverty in two-parent families. Pelton (1989) stated that "while low income is the best predictor of child protection racial disparities, the disproportionate poverty levels among minorities is a key factor in explaining the racial/ethnic disparities seen in the child protection system" (p. 8). Poverty affects parents' ability to provide the necessary care for their children and the stress of being overworked and underpaid hamper parents' capabilities to be present and in touch with their children. Lindsey (1991) as stated in Courtney et al. (1996) reported that for children in all age groups, their parent's income level was the major determinant of whether or not they were removed from their family.

Poverty and Disproportionate Risk for Abuse and Neglect

While poverty is more likely to affect families of color, the research does not indicate that poverty is related to disproportionate risk for abuse and neglect for families and children of color. Several authors (Morton, 1999; Sedlak & Schultz, 2001, 2005) point out that multiple waves of the National Incidence Studies show that despite their higher representation in the ranks of the poor, there is no higher rate of abuse in African American or Native American families. Rodenbery (2004) found that even when controlling for poverty, "children of color and their families were less likely to receive services to ameliorate the impact of poverty, such as housing and employment support, than Caucasian families" (Harris & Hackett, 2008, p. 202).

Family Structure

According to the United States Census (2000), there were 25.4 million White families with children (77% two-parent households, 17% mother only households, and 6% father only households). There were 4.8 million Hispanic families with children (69% two-parent

The long negative histories of these communities with the child welfare system can lead parents to feelings of "hopelessness, frustration, and greater likelihood of resignation and defeat than for others who have reason to believe the system could work in their favor" (Cahn & Harris, 2005, p. 10).

Several authors (Morton, 1999; Sedlak & Schultz, 2001, 2005) point out that multiple waves of the National Incidence Studies show that despite their higher representation in the ranks of the poor, there is no higher rate of abuse in African American or Native American families.

households, 23% mother only households, and 8% father only households). There were 4.6 million African American families (42% two-parent households, 51% mother only households, and 7% father only households). Lucker (1996) concluded in a study that the birth rate for unwed Whites is increasing (Harris & Courtney, 2003). Research continues to show that African Americans are more likely to reside in extended family households than White families (Angel & Tienda, 1982; Beck & Beck, 1989; Farley & Allen, 1987; Hoffert, 1984; Rice, 1994). Statistics showed that 67.6% of African Americans came from families headed by a single mother, 5.6 % from families headed by a single father, and the re-maining 26.8% from two-parent families. Hispanic children were more likely to come from two-parent families, 1.3 times more than Whites, 1.7 times more than African Americans (Johnson, Clark, Donald, Pedersen, & Pichotta, 2007). Other studies including a Minne-sota study have concluded that the disparities in services for different races cannot simply be explained by poverty, drug abuse, and family structure. While society may not agree with decisions by women who become single mothers, despite their higher representa-tion in the ranks of the poor, there is no higher rate of abuse in African American or Na-tive American families.

Many studies have concluded that even accounting for differences in socioeconomic level and a greater prevalence of high-risk family structures, children and families of color tend to be overrepresented in child protective service systems (Johnson, Clark, Donald, Ped-ersen, & Pichotta, 2007). The U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) reported that more than 50% of African American children lived in single-parent homes in 2000, whereas only 17% White and 25% Hispanic youth lived in single-parent homes (Green, 2002). The third National Incidence Study (NIS-3) conducted by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1996, reported no statistically significant difference in the incidence of child maltreatment across all races when controlling for other risk factors (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996). According to Rose (1999), the increased rates of neglect are reflective of the increased rates of poverty, substance abuse and lack of a consensus regarding the definition of child neglect among researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and members of communities of color. Rose (1999) conducted a qualita-tive study and examined feelings, attitudes, views, and a personal definition for the word, "neglect;" African American birth mothers and public child welfare workers participated in focus groups; mothers overall judgments' in all categories were more serious than the workers. Factors such as labeling bias (the likelihood that a physician would attribute injury to abuse), frequency of neglect (due to the inability to afford or locate childcare), substance abuse, and homelessness are linked to a family's resources; these factors can greatly impact a child's likelihood of being reported for maltreatment (Johnson, Clark, Donald, Pedersen, & Pichotta, 2007).

Birth Fathers

Many prior research studies have focused primarily on single mothers. Recent studies have begun to bring the voice of fathers to research. "On almost every indicator of child well-being, children in 2002 fared worse than their counterparts did just a generation ago. The reason proposed by some is the dramatic rise, over the last 30 years, in the number of children living in fatherless households. In 1960, less than 8 million children were living in families where the father was absent; in 2002, 24 million children were living in families without their fathers (National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Prac-tice, 2002, p. 1). Many have asked the question, "Where are the fathers?" However, in the child welfare system, fathers are forgotten. Divorce, single motherhood, child support and welfare policies, and incarceration are the prime reasons for the absence of many fathers. Fathers have been stigmatized with a pervasive attitude, from school systems and human services to the media that "Dads don't matter. Men are inept parents." (National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, 2002, p. 2). Even fathers

Rodenbery (2004) found that even when control-ling for poverty, "children of color and their families were less likely to receive services to ameliorate the impact of poverty, such as housing and employment support, that Caucasian families" (Harris & Hackett, 2008, p. 202).

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> Yet research demonstrates to society that "children growing up without the presence of fathers are more likely to fail at school or to drop out, engage in early sexual activity, develop drug and alcohol problems, and experience or perpetrate violence" (National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, 2002, p. 2).

who would like to be a part of their children's lives, regardless of their marital or financial status, have often been overlooked or marginalized. Yet research demonstrates to society that "children growing up without the presence of fathers are more likely to fail at school or to drop out, engage in early sexual activity, develop drug and alcohol problems, and experience or perpetrate violence" (National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, 2002, p. 2).

Fathers play a critical role in the optimal development and well-being of a child. A father's role extends beyond economic support and includes providing nurturance, care giving, and emotional support. Successful fatherhood correlates strongly with many attributes of children successfully growing up. Studies have shown that fathers have a significant impact and role in the lives of their families, including the ability to provide. Most foster children are not living with their fathers at the time they are removed from their homes (Malm, Murray, & Green, 2006). Once in foster care, these children may experience even less contact with their nonresident fathers. Malm, Murray, and Green (2006) sought to assess typical child welfare practice with respect to nonresident fathers of children in foster care. Local agency caseworkers were interviewed by phone and a sample of 2000 children from Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota and Tennessee was utilized to examine front-line practices related to nonresident fathers. Researchers found that nonresident fathers of children in foster care are not often involved in case planning efforts and nearly half were never contacted by the child welfare agency. By not reaching out to fathers, caseworkers may overlook potential social connections and resources that could help to achieve permanency for the child (Malm, Murray, & Green 2006).

Several studies on the involvement of fathers have limitations. For example, some studies of impoverished African American fathers have generalized their findings to describe African American fathers of all income levels, and in addition, many studies rely on mothers' reports of parental involvement, rather than direct information from fathers (Dubowitz, Lane, Rose, & Vaughan, 2004). While this study was done within the healthcare system, it informs the child welfare system in better understanding the role of father's in their children's lives. Such an understanding of fathers' roles should help to further understanding of father-child relationships and overcome barriers to father involvement. This study explored the following factors: (a) spending time with children; (b) material provisions; (c) emotional support; (d) decision-making/responsibility; (e) teaching/helping; (f) role modeling; (g) protecting; and (h) ensuring general welfare. Fathers also shared the barriers they face. According to Dubowitz, Lane, Rose, and Vaughan (2004), 29 fathers described financial barriers as a limitation to being a good father. Twenty-seven of the fathers in this study discussed their work or career as a barrier to parenting, either because of limited income or long hours from working two jobs. Barriers were also experienced due to the type of relationship with their child's mother; 50% of the fathers wished to improve the relationship with the mother of their children (Dubowitz, et al., 2004).

> Most foster children are not living with their fathers at the time they are removed from their homes (Malm, Murray, & Green, 2006).

Next Steps for Informing Best Practice

Addressing and reducing disproportionality in the child welfare system, has been given the call for national attention, and placed on the agenda for many to reduce. At the Black Administrators in Child Welfare Annual Conference, a presentation was done on Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality and Disparities in Child Welfare: Recent Federal Efforts. The organization is committed to leverage resources, expertise, and experience with others who share their goal that all children and families in the child welfare system regardless of race, receive the kind of opportunities, and supports they need. In a qualitative study, stakeholders in a nine city series of focus groups suggest that families of color would benefit from a culturally responsive advocate or guide to the system (Caliber-Associates, 2003). An advocate would help explain what is happening, encourage parents to believe there is hope of recovery if they have a substance abuse problem, and assist

the parent in demonstrating to the court and social worker their capacity to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their children. Presenters at the conference concluded that promising strategies must be those that increase access to support services, reduce bias, and increase availability of permanent homes. All seem to be viable and include family and community members in making key decisions that will reduce the number of children entering the child welfare system, inform and shape policies, and create promising practices (2008).

In Illinois McLean County, the number of African American children removed from their homes had decreased by more than half, from 24.1 per 1,000 African American children to 11.1. This decrease and significant impact was made after implementing a business plan that began with an assessment of the service environment and contextual factors in the target community, followed by improving the quality of existing services that were indicated by the behavioral change model that guided the intervention (Redd, Suggs, Gibbons, Muhammad, McDonald, & Bell, 2004).

The Casey-Center for Study of Social Policy (CSSP) Alliance for Racial Equality released an extensive guide entitled; "*Places to Watch: Promising Practices to Address Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare Services.*" One of the states highlighted for leading the way in addressing racial disproportionality and disparity is Guilford County, North Carolina. The Guilford County Department of Social Services is providing significant leadership to address racial disproportionality and disparity; the strategies they have developed and implemented are as follows: (a) enhancing data tracking; (b) broadening communication; (c) developing community partnerships; (d) solidifying funding: (e) expanding and reforming staff training; and (f) expanding Team Decision Making (TDM).

The approach to reduce disproportionality must be holistic and include key political and community leaders as well as constituents. This approach would create an opportunity for learning, removing biases and stigmas, collaborative work to achieve the ultimate goal of providing better care for all children, eliminating disproportionality and disparities, and remembering that families and communities are essential to a child's growth and life experiences.

Casey Family Programs has delineated several practices that may improve outcomes for children and families of color who are already involved with the child welfare system:

- **Family Group Conferencing** – Involving families in the decision-making process increases the potential for enabling extended family to gain custody of children, locating kin who may provide permanency, assuring birth families that children will remain safe and well, and providing an opportunity for families to contribute their ideas about cultural issues.

- **Reunification** – To ensure all children for whom reunification is an appropriate option are returned to their parents' custody in a timely manner, the report recommends agencies use strengths-based assessment methods; understand local, State, and national advocacy efforts; explore alternative practices to improve timely substance abuse treatment for birth parents; and provide post-reunification services and supports.

- **Placement With Relatives** – Steps that can be taken to increase placement of children with relatives include: using a broader definition of "relative," asking the child's birth family for information, employing family group conferencing to identify kin placements, and improving supports available to kinship caregivers.

- **Diligent Recruitment** – Strategies for recruiting potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom these homes are needed include identifying the right communities to target, using child-specific recruitment efforts and family group conferencing, and employing team decision making.

- **Maintaining Family Connections** – When nonrelative placements are necessary, it is important to maintain the child's connections with birth parents, siblings, and other kin by providing the maximum amount of visitation and placing children with siblings whenever possible.

- **Achieving Timely Permanency When Reunification Is Not Possible** – Attempts to find permanent families are often discontinued when children have been in out-of-home care for years, but child welfare professionals are discovering diligent child-specific recruitment efforts combined with continued work with youth can lead to successful permanent placements.

- **Culturally Competent Practice** – Acknowledging the importance of diversity builds mutual respect and trust among families and professionals. This can be achieved by seeking consumer input, engaging in ongoing organizational assessment, and aiding in the development of a healthy ethnic identity for children being served (Casey Family Programs, 2003, pp. 3-17).

Dr. Marian S. Harris and Dr. Wanda Hackett (2008) concluded the following in their study: "As long as disproportionality is viewed as an individual or personal issue of African Americans and Native American children or other children of color, the solutions to disproportionality will not be focused in the public domain of the child welfare system, a system that created and has continued to perpetuate disproportionality" (p. 202).

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